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Logic in Igbo-African Understanding

Ogugua, Paul Ikechukwu - Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

E-mail: paiykeo@yahoo.co.uk

Tel: +2348033667677

&

Oduah, Ifunanya C. - Vox Populi Chambers, Awka

E-mail: +2348037419365

Abstract

Logic is related to thought and truth; and reality is related to consciousness and knowledge. There is no gainsaying that logic is indeed related to understanding, which has to do with language and meaning. This paper wants to examine the logic question in Igbo-African understanding, and in order to do that it will examine the issue of rationality as some writers claimed that Africans are prelogical, and examine too the epistemic categories which the traditional Africans used in the bid to get at knowledge; and understanding through the use of sentences.

Key words: Rationality, logic, understanding, meaning

Introduction

To think of Igbo-African understanding is to presume Igbo-African knowledge. Man as a conscious animal has a relation to reality and knowledge. Man can only know something or somebody. It is not surprising therefore that consciousness and reality meet at the universe of knowledge. In the same vein, Ogugua (2003) states that thought is related to logic and truth; logic and thought meet at the universe of truth and vice versa. That means we can talk of logic of thought, and truth; truth of logic and thought, language and understanding meet at the universe of meaning. Is it difficult to see why it is reasonable to talk of the language of understanding, and language of meaning, or understanding of language and understanding of meaning? It is not correct to think of understanding of reality. It rather should be knowledge of reality, for between knowledge and understanding lies comprehension which deals with relations between and/or among concepts.

Logic implies rationality

Logic is the art and science of reasoning which aids us to proceed with ease in the art of reasoning. Man can reason because he is a rational animal and is endowed with the faculty of rationality. Logic could then be said to be a science and art of study of existence or life with the aid of the mind by way of languages, patterns of operation, principles, methods or even techniques of valid or sound reasoning which must not be formalized. Logic is natural to every people and culture. Uduma (1998) attests:

... it is the facility of logic that disposes one to maintain a balance in reality, that is, the facility of logic is what enables man to apprehend, hence strike a balance between himself and the world.

He adds:

The organization and ordering of reality in and through logic, thus, points to the fact that logic is a natural disposition (p. 383).

Logic remains an aspect of our personality, hence natural to every Homo sapiens. Nze (1998) consents thus:

It is only when logic is understood to mean no more than a collection of technical rules, mnemonics fashioned out by

the elite of a given group and culture to help the mind in its operations that certain people of a different culture who do not possess such sets of rules are erroneously identified and isolated as existing without logic, as possessing no logic (p. 129).

And Runes stated in his Handbook that “in fact, the astonishing similarity of proverbs and other practical statements all over the globe, in primitive as well as modern times is *prima facie* evidence that men think alike in matters of practical occurrences” (129).

Logic is the tool man uses to explore the nature of things and of linguistic forms in order to appreciate the content of what is said; hence it underpins understanding of the meaning of anything or any statement. It is an aid to understanding and equally clarification of concepts and their meanings. Our understanding depends on the logical element which coordinates our perceptions, words, concepts, judgements, etc making it a human act. A human act according to Ogugua (2005) is “an act which proceeds from the deliberate freewill of man, an act consciously controlled, hence man is responsible for the act.”(20) By implication, it is an act that has the qualities of knowledge, freedom, voluntariness, intention, etc. At this point, let us examine the issue of rationality.

The concept of rationality

Experience tends to show that ‘rationality’s is a ‘crystal place’ which the underground man of Dostoevsky has marked; and that people are neither wholly and perfectly rational nor irrational; or their behaviour incoherent. The domain which falls within the evoked extremes is explored by different theories of rationality. Livingston Paisley (1991) states:

The way people in fact manage to understand and predict each other’s behaviour is by relying on certain kinds of attributions of belief, intention, and desire.

He adds:

... this kind of intentional explanation of other people’s behaviour relies on some very basic assumptions about the rationality of the agent.(3)

The agent in question is not infallible, for his horizon could be limited, as knowledge is usually perspectival, for perception in a sense defines reality (perception is reality and vice versa). Livingston (1991) captures this thus:

The rationality heuristic is fallible because human rationality is limited and imperfect: our thinking about ourselves and others is neither omnipotent nor omniscient
(3)

As rationality is factored by so many items - beliefs, desires and intentions, a seeming rational and strange practice could manifest a basic syllogism of practical rationality. It does seem that if there is no rationality then there is no agent, and by way of extension, if there is no agency then there will be no textuality which ought to spring up from contextuality. One can talk of many types of rationality like: epistemic, practical rationality, etc, which could be of bounded or minimal form, whichever it is, it is rationality, with difference only in degree and not in kind.

Ordinarily this term rationality is derived from reason, which suggests adopting beliefs, opinions, etc on some appropriate reason; and not on emotion or faith. It has some basic issue: agency, intention, action, etc. Problem of rationality arises at different levels of discourse such as the assumption that Africans are prelogical, some of our beliefs are irrational, and at the level of rationality being an essentially contested concept; this suggests different camps with particular set of rules which does not or may not apply to other camps. Cohen (1992) identified up to nine forms of rationality: rationality of logic, rationality of mathematical calculation, rationality as exhibited in ampliative induction, scientific rationality and so on (415-420) Related to our research are rationality of logic and scientific rationality as some philosophers and scientists tend to agree that with these forms of rationality one is armed with proper criterion or criteria for evaluation of any form of knowledge or knowledge claim.

Different problems about and around rationality arise due to the fact that rationality arises due to the fact that rationality is an essential quality of man. For some, Africans lack rationality because they are pre-logical or emotional. Of course this is untenable for no human group could rightly be said to lack rationality; for classifications done in the use of language take cognizant of the logical principles of identity, non-contradiction, etc. And the way they live in society points to their application of the logical principle of inductive.

Moreover, the adjective 'rational' is used in referring to the agent of an action and even man's specific beliefs, opinions, or even knowledge-claims. Rationality could be contrasted with non-rationality and not necessarily irrationality as some scholars contend. A rational agent that violates the principles of rational assessment of a situation or thing should be deemed to be irrational and not non-rational which is applicable to stone, trees, etc. Some beliefs too may be said to be non-rational where no reasons are or could be adduced for them.

It was with Aristotle of Stagira that rationality lost its original cloak or meaning and took up a more technical cloak or meaning whereby it portends the use of the rigorous rules of logic in deciding whether a proposition, opinion, etc should be tagged rational or not. And with the attendant rise in science which introduced the scientific method as would be seen in Bacon, Mills, Popper, and many others philosophers of science and scientists the technical conception of rationality held sway. With Ayer and people of his like positivists nothing qualifies as knowledge if it does not conform to the method of science or the strict rules of logic. When it entered their head they made attempts to extrude metaphysics the very basis of science. Faced with this situation, Feyerabend introduced a new kind of rationality which he believed to have its foundation in rationality as conceived in Western culture championed by Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Newton, etc. Rationality for these people consists in acceptance of certain procedures, rules or standards to which every belief, opinion or knowledge-claim must conform to. This idea is here with us even in this post-modernist era, that many scholars have gone hay-wire in discarding any form or knowledge which does not conform to these universal rules of logic and tag it irrational. The question is how correct are they? Is it right to use the rationality in and of a system to judge another system with its own dose of rationality? How realistic is it to judge an object of knowledge or reality from the product of one prism? How are we sure a perception of an entity gives us everything about that entity? These scientists and philosophers to my mind have erred for philosophy does not pass judgement, as their position has not guaranteed us that they have carried out an objective assessment moreso, when other forms of knowledge show themselves as useful.

Logic and language

As there is a relationship as we have said earlier between logic and thought, since thought is internal language, invariably there is equally a relationship

between logic and language. One may not be in error if one holds that logic is the science of the laws of thought and language. Words which are fortresses of thought are universes of their own, hence are arches for the mind. Since every universe is complete in itself, it is logical, for that which is one is logical, there is no contradiction as it is both consistent and coherent with and by itself. Little wonder Uduma (1998) points out that “in logic we are interested in words only as the visible and audible forms in which thought fixes and controls its own meaning” (376). There is no doubt that both language and logic are related, or else why is language very central in the development of logic(s). Is it difficult to see the place or importance of logic in dialectics, analysis and synthesis in philosophy and other sciences? Is it not logic that aided the sophists in their efforts in overcoming ambiguities, inadequacies etc? What of the importance of logic in studying inferences does it not improve the language of discourse? One’s ability to organize human experiences and make valid inferences tend to show that one has logical ability; for one cannot claim to be familiar with any language without being familiar with rules or laws of logic. Logic is a natural disposition everyman has being a rational animal but its fundamental nature is incommunicable save it is communicated through a language.

Logic in Igbo-African understanding

There is no gainsaying the fact that Igbo language has helped us (The Igbo) in forming the logical structures of thought. Why do we say so? Because logic is the study of the principles of valid thinking or reasoning is concerned with language. The grammatical structure of language: prepositions, verbs, adverbs, etc corresponds the structure of our thinking. Language gives thinking a form, it canalizes though yet it cannot do without logic.

Experience has thought us that the Igbo make use of logic in their everyday life in every aspect of their life. Nze (1998) writes:

The Igbo make natural efforts to apply their metaphysics, nay, their logic, in resolving problems of the day; their understanding corresponds with their experience (135).

They have logic that is readily available and for the purpose at hand. The Igbo have a native faculty which perceives the coherence of ideas, though not instructed in syllogism of Aristotle or the West or in methods of syllogising or taught to think or reason by way of rules, still they arrange ideas in a

coherent form and follow some pattern of consistency. Is it not reason that informs the Igbo naming of persons, events or even things? That is, ugbo mmiri – water boat. What of the measured notches on palm trees which they use in climbing palm trees? Is it not reason that informed such a product? Is it not reason that informed the traditional engineering works in the land? Such works like houses, building of bridges, etc.

The history of logics has not shown that there is only one logic. It has rather shown a multiplicity of logics, and Igbo logic is in this class. We have to point out Igbo logic and its expression in three aspects of life in order to clear the doubt whether or not there is logic in Igbo-African understanding, by examining a problem, the use of rule of inference, and examining the logic in ‘Afa’ phenomenon; as ‘Afa’ is one of the oldest institution which has survived Western modernization influence.

Ogugua (2003) writes:

Proverbs are epigrams which are commonly used as expressions of traditional wisdom which is indicative of one’s familiarity with the Igbo cultural system (128).

The Igbo say “*Ilu bu mmanya eji esuru okwu*” – ‘Proverb is the oil with which words are eaten. ‘Ogugua (2003) emphasizes “one who does not know and understand (enough or at all) proverbs is considered as a neophyte, a toddler, naïve, inexperienced and at times as foolish.”(129) Proverbs reveal a lot about the Igbo people and the Igbo world as it is based on according to Ogugua (2000),

the customs of the people, hence it is a reflection, and expression of a peoples’ entire cultural system, which embodies their beliefs, attitudes, emotions, perceptions and values (129).

Igbo proverbs have three levels of meaning: the philosophical, literal and contextual. Do you think no reasoning has been in the construction of these proverbs so as to make these levels of meaning clear or open to sight? Do you think no logic has gone into these proverbs and the principle of non-contradiction, principle of identity, excluded middle and so on have been complied with? Why do these proverbs seem to be fallacy free? Think about these proverbs

- a. “*Agadi nwan yi daa ada ugboro ato agua ife obu n’ukpo onu*’ – If an old woman falls down thrice, the content of her basket should be counted.
- b. “*Okuko ebu n’isi imaghi na ije di anya*’ – the fowl which is carried on the head does not know that the road is far.

In (a) the content should be counted in order to ascertain whether the old woman fell down due to the heaviness of her load or to trace it to some other thing i.e. slippery terrain or even sickness. Is there no logic in associating her falls to various things? Is there no logic in associating her falls to various things? Is there no logic in the observation of the consistency of the falls and the need to verify? Think about it. Do not forget that the context of a proverb determines or aids in the determination of the meaning.

The Igbo people observe some of the laws of thought such as law of identity, excluded middle, non-contradiction, etc. These may not be pencilled down yet they are followed and applied in Igbo understanding. Some of the rules of thought guide the Igbo in investigating what a thing really is and in their thoughtful analysis of issues or problems before them. The Igbo beliefs, opinions, behaviour are no doubt rooted in a sort of logic. Experience has affirmed that the Igbo man has a consistent way of relating to his fellow men – communalism, relating to the environment, etc. Tempels (1959) states:

Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent, unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete positive philosophy of the universe....
(19)

Igbo behaviour which is a manifestation or an expression of Igbo understanding is based on logic or a logical structure, which no doubt is a form of applied metaphysics.

The Igbo have argued in accordance with the rules of inference i.e. rules of simplification, disjunctive syllogism, and even to the extent of exhibiting the characteristics of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*. Imagine a dispute over a parcel of land and Okeke claims ownership because his father took him to that piece of land to farm while he was a kid; and Nweke argued that his father before he died informed him that the land was originally Okeke father’s, but that it was transferred to him when he forfeited his parcel of land very close to where he built his family house of *Iyi-agwu*. At this point in

time, the elders will then use inductive logic to decide who really owns this piece of land now. And it was decided that it is more preferable that the piece of land belongs to Nweke and not Okeke based on the antecedents presented by the parties to the dispute. Do you see the application of logic in the settlement of the dispute?

What informed the Igbo-man's classification of items into classes? What of the classification of some type of things as consumable and others as not? Is it not logic that aids them to make proper distinction between these classes of things i.e. *ero-fungus* that is eatable and another brand that is poisonous. Logic form the true basis of knowledge and it forms the platform to hold consistently the thing it underpins thereby creating and furnishing capability to define concepts properly and ensure stability in the household of knowledge. Think about the kind of inference that could be made in this Igbo aphorism: *Agba mbu agba n'ogwe, agba abu agba n'ogwe, o buzi so ogwe ka apiri aku?* – If the first shot struck on the trunk, the second shot struck there too, were the arrows meant for the trunk? It is a kind adage used to question misleading performance. The argument with the force in repetition eschews pleading ignorance or mistake for a kind of performance. Remember argument is the central field of logic. Is the Igbo-African bereft of logic in this kind of argument or/and analysis? Definitely he is not.

Let us look at another scenario to examine the nature and quality of Igbo-African logic. Imagine that in Onitsha town for instance, the Umuezechima produced the last Obi who had died. There are other villages qualified to produce the future obi in succession and it is argued thus:

The last Obi came from Umezechima family

The one he succeeded came from Ogbuli family.

It is not wise that the future Obi should come from either of the two families above.

It stands to reason therefore that the future Obi should come from Olosi family as this family has not produced an obi in recent times.

The argument above is in valid form; it followed the rule of disjunctive syllogism. Or let us put the Igbo saying '*Alusi adiro ire awa ya nku*' – If a

god/goddess is not powerful it will be put to the flames in a kind of syllogistic form to expose the kind of logical structure behind the sentence

If I worship a god, that god is supposed to influence my fortunes and protect me.

This god does not influence my fortune and does not protect me.

Therefore I should stop worshipping it.

This is couched in the form of *modus tollens*. An experiential look around the Igbo world will show some people who abandoned one duty or the other, one way of doing something or the other because it has not been satisfactory to them.

There is logic in the operation of the ‘*Dibia Afa*’ who uses ‘*Afa Ugili*’ to inquire and investigate into the nature of things. Bonachristus defined it as “the very ear of silent and revealing intelligence with the *Ugili* seed shells communed with the noisy and expository wisdom of the tortoise.” *Afa* is the science of being; a system of thought and logic which underpins all that is and that could possibly be for the Igbo. The sixteen halved seed shells of *Afa* which are strung in fours, and the tortoise shell, has so many combination depending on the creative throws which brings to sight the open and closed *Ugili* seed. The ‘*Dibia Afa*’ with considerable logical and mathematical intelligence goes all out to offer interpretations to the different computations occasioned by the creative and spirit-filled throws of the ‘*Afa Ugili*’. This logical and mathematical interpretation definitely will come from the various combination of the archtypes ‘Obi’ and ‘Akwa’. ‘Obi’ has four open spaces while the ‘Akwa’ has four closed space. Each throw presents a varied combination of ‘Okala’, ‘Agali’, ‘Ora’, ‘Ijite’, ‘Ululu’, ‘Obala’, ‘Ofu’, ‘Ogeli’, ‘Aka’, ‘Atulukpa’, ‘Ete’, ‘Otule’, ‘Ose’, ‘Odi’ and several other computations. It is logic which guides the Igbo in a relational and orderly study of reality, and in this logic or logics one could discover a metaphysics of not only formations and transformations of existence but equally that of relation as the archtypes in ‘*Afa*’ phenomenon call each other into a parametric order of integration, creating a mean of their differential integration as they are complementary principles of light and darkness.

Is it too difficult too to observe the logic in the septenary principles Ogugua (2003, 2006, 2009) posited of Igbo-African communalism, Igbo-African

medicine, Igbo-African cultural values? What else underpins a pattern of articulation and understanding if not logic and/or logics? What of the idea of causality? Is there no logic therein?

Concluding remark

We did not ask whether Igbo-African logic exists or not. We did not ask about the possibility or not. We did not ask about the possibility of it. We have always affirmed that there is Igbo-African logic, not only in the sense of being a pattern of thinking as in natural logic but even in the form of enthymeme, which could be developed into syllogistic form.

More easily discoverable is natural logic as applied in juridical and pragmatic form geared towards solving concrete problems in life. Maduka Enyimba (2005) is not in doubt that there is African logic, he posits:

Logic in Africa is organic to African culture and performs the task of helping such culture to attain higher levels. And since every age has its special problems, it is therefore the business of logic to help in solving such problems thereby being of service to humanity in general.

He adds:

African logic enables the African to verify his evidence and that of others appealing to the laws of inductive and deductive reasoning (56).

Igbo-Africans do not concern themselves alone with the form or the structure of what is said but equally important is the content of the argument. That is why the beliefs, myths and rituals in the Igbo-African world are not taken or accepted hood, link and sinker. Some of their contents are interrogated. They may ask is it rational to believe in the existence of spiritual beings? For some Christians there is nothing like witchcraft; but for the Igbo-African witchcraft is a cult and witches and wizards exist. Is it therefore irrational and illogical to believe that witches exist? Again the methods used in arriving at these beliefs, myths and rituals may not be readily clear to a non-Igbo. The question of method is relevant to show that the Igbo-African do not just accept or believe anything. Remember rationality and truth are not the same, for certain things may be rational and yet not true.

The Igbo-African does not doubt that there is logic in his language and thought pattern, his logic is more practical, pragmatic and applied than in syllogistic forms. Ijomah (1995) states:

The raw data for logic in Africa is indeed what the people think is the relationship among realities and it is only when these data are available that what should be the case is established (14)

The truth of the matter is that the Igbo-African cannot rightly be excluded from the class of logicians. They have logic embedded in their language and behaviour or existential practices; this brand of logic is natural and applied. That does not mean the Igbo-African logic cannot be put in syllogistic forms, for we have done just that in the body of our work. We do not want to affirm that Igbo-African logic is at the same level of sophistication as Western logic that will simply show that we do not want to see and accept the limitation of Igbo-African logic.

Logic constitutes one of the foundations of Igbo-African understanding; categories of thought are the superstructure which no doubt is spun by logic and its exclusive principles. The small number of logical principles carry the whole weight of the inexhaustively numerous propositions derivable from them which go all out to express our understanding of the meaning of being and/or reality. If the truth of logic is established, no doubt mutual consistency of the epistemic categories and understanding are automatically guaranteed.

We hope that this work will provoke a reappraisal of some widely acclaimed philosophies of logic and philosophies of knowledge so as to expand the frontiers of knowledge in this direction; this will entail recasting of these old philosophies with the aid of the techniques of analysis, for postmodernism is concerned with universalism cum particularism of knowledge. This era is for interrogating knowledge and globalizing knowledge.

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